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Pentagon Says It May Revive Anti-Ballistic Missiles

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WASHINGTON, March 23 — The Defense Department is raising warnings that the United States would have to revive its program for building antiballistic missiles if the Soviet Union decided to put a great number of new nuclear warheads atop its existing rocket force.

In a recent interview, a senior Defense official said that without the new treaty on limitation of strategic arms, Moscow could continue to increase the number of multiple warheads on its intercontinental

missile force in the coming decade until it threatened not only the existing land-based missile force of the United States but also the Air Force's proposed MX mobile intercontinental missile.

Accordingly, the official said that additional funds had been put in the fiscal year 1981 budget for development of an antiballistic missile system that could defend American land-based rockets from the threat of a Soviet nuclear strike.

Senate action on the new strategic arms agreement was deferred in January after the Russians invaded Afghanistan.

In the 1960s, both Moscow and Washington developed and started to deploy antiballistic missile systems, designed mainly to protect cities from nuclear attack. In May 1972, United States and Soviet negotiators agreed to a treaty that did not limit warheads, but prohibited the two nations from deploying more than two antiballistic sites each. The Soviet Union now has one antiballistic missile site, consisting of 64 launchers, in the vicinity of Moscow. The only American antiballistic missile site, at Grand Forks, N. D., was deactivated five years ago.

Now, however, American military officials are saying that before 1985 Moscow is likely to achieve the capacity to launch a successful "first strike" against the Air Force's existing force of 1,054 land-based rockets. In anticipation of this threat, the Carter Administration has proposed to replace some of these missiles, which are housed in underground silos in the Middle West, with 200 MX rockets that would be moved in and out of 4,600 concrete shelters to be built in Utah and Nevada. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and other military aides said last year that the system would rule out any Soviet "first strike."

But in recent months, some officials have begun to argue that Moscow, in the coming decade, could deploy more than enough nuclear warheads to knock out the proposed MX system. A new estimate by the Central Intelligence Agency is said to have concluded that without the new arms treaty, which would limit warhead numbers, Soviet missiles could be adapted to deliver between 20,000 and 30,000 nuclear bombs before 1990.

The Russians now have a force of about 1,400 land-based missiles equipped with about 4,500 multiple nuclear warheads.

As a result, the senior official said the Pentagon had decided to study a new antiballistic missile system that could be used to defend the MX against any Soviet nuclear strike. At the same time, the official said that any decision to deploy antiballistic missiles would require the United States to either pull out of the 1972 treaty restricting the systems or to enter into new talks with Moscow on revising the agreement.

Calling the 1972 treaty "really valuable," the official said that any effort to renegotiate the accord would hurt Soviet-United States arms control efforts across the board.

Although the 1972 treaty restricts the deployment of antiballistic missiles, both sides are permitted to work on developing new systems. Moscow is said by intelligence analysts to spend about \$1 billion a year on antiballistic missile research, while the Pentagon's budget for fiscal year 1981 includes about \$265 million for work in this area.